UNITED
NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.740
11 October 2001

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-eighth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 740th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Friday, 5 October 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DOEK

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Gambia (continued) (CRC/C/3/Add.61; CRC/C/Q/GAM/1; written replies of the Government of the Gambia to the questions in the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in English only))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of the Gambia resumed places at the Committee table.

2. Ms. KARP said that, in her understanding, the Ministry of Justice was acting as a focal point for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. She hoped that the Ministry would not focus only on legislation, which was important, but that the primary concern would be the implementation of legislation and its impact on the individual child.

3. She understood that flogging and other forms of corporal punishment were still legal. Did the Government intend to abolish such punishment? How did the Government ensure that teachers were not violent in schools? Details of any campaigns to raise awareness of other forms of punishment should be provided. A culture of silence seemed to surround violence against children, especially sexual abuse. More information should be provided about whether the Gambia had a structure to address the problem. She welcomed the fact that educational grants were being provided for girls, but was concerned that such affirmative action could be considered as discriminatory against boys. Were there any grants available to boys who could not afford to go to school? With regard to juvenile justice, were judges or social workers trained to listen to the views of the child before making a decision? It would also be interesting to know whether the principles of the Convention would be taken into account when the juvenile court was established.

4. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ asked whether non-governmental organizations (NGOs) would be represented in the national commission that was envisaged to monitor the implementation of the Convention. It was also important that men should become involved in the implementation of children's rights, as it seemed that women were largely responsible not only for rearing children but for ensuring their rights.

5. Mr. NDOW (Gambia), in reply to a question about how statistics were disaggregated, said that two national household surveys had been conducted for the purpose of identifying targets for the poverty reduction strategy. Particular attention had been paid to the geographical distribution of poverty over the seven localities and to the gender of the heads of household. Households had been disaggregated into nine economic groups, which provided a very clear idea of the situation.

6. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia), referring to the fact that the statistics on birth registration provided on page 3 of the written replies were low, said that the figures represented the issuance of birth certificates rather than the registration of births. In fact, a high percentage of babies were registered, because children needed to be registered in order to be given a medical card for

immunization, and late registration incurred a charge. The maternal and child health care unit had introduced outreach programmes so that babies born at home in areas without a health centre could be registered. The issuance of birth certificates was less widespread, and although the Government was making efforts to decentralize the system of granting certificates and to raise awareness of the importance of the document, which was needed for national identification, school enrolment and for the acquisition of passports, much remained to be done.

7. Ms. THOMASI (Gambia), in reply to a question about discrimination against children in conflict with the law, said that the situation had improved. A detention centre for juvenile delinquents had been built which provided access to education and counselling, and efforts were also being made to reintegrate the children into the mainstream school system.

8. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia) said that the Department of Social Welfare had conducted a survey on street children with the assistance of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Programmes had been designed to reduce the number of children living on the streets and to encourage such children to go to school. With regard to refugees, the Gambia had set up a national committee responsible for the registration and resettlement of refugees, which provided health services, basic supplies, family planning services and counselling. Replying to a question by the Chairperson, she said it was true that while the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was implementing measures to ensure that schools were provided in the refugee camps, refugee children living outside the camps were the responsibility of the Government and did not receive funding for their schooling; if families could afford to live outside of the camps, they should be able to afford to pay for their children's schooling. It was also complicated to enrol refugee children in normal schools because they often arrived during term-time when classes were already full. Advice about enrolment was available, however, to all refugees when they arrived in the Gambia.

9. Mr. SEY (Gambia) said that it was not the Government's policy to exclude refugee children from schools.

10. Ms. THOMASI (Gambia) said that the situation of children had improved considerably since the Gambia's ratification of the Convention. A Global Movement for Children had been created by members of the National Assembly to raise awareness of the rights of the child.

11. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia) said that the National Youth Council had been established with the assistance of the Government and NGOs to organize programmes focusing on children. The National Youth Week, the Day of the African Child and the National Broadcasting Day for Children had been designated to create public awareness of youth issues and to give children the opportunity to express their views. Children also participated regularly in debates on a national television programme.

12. Mr. SEY (Gambia) said that the Government encouraged pupils to become actively involved in the running of schools and promoted a research-based approach to learning. The relationship between teachers and pupils had improved dramatically in recent years.

13. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) said that eliminating all forms of violence against children was among the priorities on the national agenda. The Department of State for Education was working with the Department of Social Welfare to monitor the situation of violence against children in schools. The police were involved if formal reports were made and strict disciplinary measures were taken if teachers were found to be abusing their pupils.

14. Mr. SEY (Gambia), replying to a question by Ms. Karp about whether corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure was permitted in schools, said that traditionally, corporal punishment could only be administered by the head teacher and had to be recorded in a logbook. A teachers' handbook had just been prepared by the Government, however, to encourage alternative forms of discipline.

15. Ms. THOMASI (Gambia) said that a policy on sexual harassment of children at schools had recently been drafted and a study had been carried out into early marriage and teenage pregnancy. It was true that there was no legislation to prevent a juvenile from being sentenced to capital punishment, but measures would be taken to rectify the situation in the forthcoming review of legislation relating to children.

16. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) said that infanticide was not a widespread phenomenon, although the Government remained vigilant. Most cases involved babies born out of wedlock, particularly resulting from teenage pregnancies. The number of cases had decreased over the last decade, perhaps because attitudes towards children born out of wedlock were slowly changing and because the courts facilitated adoption procedures by asking no unduly difficult questions. Unwanted children were normally placed in the care of relatives or family friends, rather than being abandoned. Customary practices meant that no formal steps were usually taken in such cases to adopt the child, although legal adoption was becoming more common.

17. Replying to a question about the provision in the Gambian Constitution according to which a child of not more than seven years of age found in the Gambia whose parents were not known would be presumed to be a citizen of the Gambia by birth, he said that the age of seven had been chosen to limit the number of abandoned children from surrounding countries and to restrict the trafficking of children. Efforts would be made, however, to amend the age limit so that children over seven did not face discrimination.

18. Concerning a question by Ms. Al-Thani about how abandoned or neglected children were named when they were informally adopted, and whether the children had any inheritance rights, children who were legally adopted were given the family's name and were entitled to the same rights as natural children. Customary adoptions, however, did not transfer parental rights and the children were not entitled to inheritance rights. Such adoptions were at best a temporary delegation of parental authority whereby the guardians provided food, clothing and shelter for the child. Replying to a question about Gambian children adopted abroad, he said that the social welfare authorities in the two countries normally liaised only if a problem arose.

19. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia) said that the Department of Social Welfare discouraged intercountry adoption, except in cases where better medical care could be provided for the child abroad.

20. Ms. CHUTIKUL asked what measures the Government had put in place to tackle the problems relating to the formal and informal adoption of rural children by urban families.

21. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia) said that with schools becoming more accessible in the rural areas the practice had become far less common. Social welfare officers constantly monitored informal adoptions, by relatives or others, and maintained close contact with the natural parents in the countryside; they also paid monthly visits to adopted children, including previously abandoned babies, and prepared reports. A period of at least three months was allowed to elapse before formal adoptions became final.

22. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) said that forced and early marriages tended to be more prevalent in the rural areas due to ignorance but that the incidence of forced marriages had decreased and was, in fact, lower than in other countries. Consanguineous marriages, although forbidden by law, continued to be practised as a tradition, and were therefore difficult to eradicate.

23. Ms. KARP noting that there was no minimum age for marriage, said that there might be very little difference between a forced and an early marriage since the younger a girl was, the less likely it was that her opinion would be sought.

24. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) said that marriages might take place as early as 14 to 16 years, but hardly before. However, internal migration had resulted in an amalgamation of different traditions. Some NGOs had embarked on public awareness campaigns in that regard.

25. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia) said that major efforts were being made to promote school attendance and satisfactory performance of girls. One NGO, in cooperation with UNICEF, had been involved in setting up "mothers' clubs" to educate the mothers themselves about the need for their girls to be educated and to involve them in the process; the NGO also worked in association with female teachers to discourage early marriages and teenage pregnancy.

26. Mr. SEY (Gambia), replying to a question on street children, said that a literacy programme had been developed specifically for such children but that it had encountered difficulties due to its non-binding nature.

27. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) said that many of the street children came from neighbouring countries ostensibly for Islamic education but were actually sent out into the streets to beg during the daytime; however, the Government was trying its best to combat the problem.

28. Ms. OUEDRAOGO questioned whether all the street children were talibé, or Koranic students from other countries, and asked what measures the Government had put in place to stem the influx of children across its borders.

29. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) said that most but not all street children were immigrants and that the Ministry of the Interior and the police were trying to control the borders in order to limit their entry into the Gambia. Even if they were sent back to their countries, however, they often returned to the Gambia within a few months. Children born out of wedlock were increasingly recognized as having the same rights as children born in wedlock. The Department of Social

Welfare made every effort, including through the courts, to ensure that maintenance was provided for such children with the result that increasingly fewer cases were reported. Nevertheless, total success was dependent on legislative reform and sensitization as both Christianity and Islam refused to acknowledge that children born out of wedlock should enjoy the same inheritance rights as children born to married parents.

30. The Department of Justice included a focal point to oversee implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Child but legislation had to be accompanied by public awareness campaigns. In that connection, a committee had been established to examine various issues, including health and social matters, and to harmonize legislation so that a Children's Code could be drafted. The initiative would include the participation of stakeholders and the examination of the legislation of other countries, including Ghana.

31. Flogging was less prevalent in schools than in the past and did not exist as a punishment meted out by the courts, as far as he knew, being perceived as a breach of the fundamental laws laid down in the Constitution concerning cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

32. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia) said that violence against and abuse of children were priority concerns for the Government; the Department of Social Welfare had set up the Child Protection Alliance, which included representatives of civil society, NGOs and youth associations, to launch public awareness campaigns, essentially through the media, and to advise the Government on programmes and help it draft relevant legislation. Research was to be conducted, in cooperation with Senegal and UNICEF, on the sexual exploitation of children.

33. Mr. SEY (Gambia) noted the existence of a code of conduct, prepared by students and teachers, and a National Advisory Council to oversee the welfare of students. There were also regional councils established to decentralize the education system, making it possible to monitor schools and promote children's rights more effectively.

34. Ms. KARP asked whether there was a structure dedicated to victims of sexual abuse, in particular to assist the police in their investigation of such cases and to encourage child victims to lodge complaints.

35. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia) said that social workers cooperated with the police in questioning victims and in obtaining assistance, including temporary placement, from the extended family if the abuse had been committed by a family member; where temporary placement with the extended family was not possible, the child was sent to the SOS Children's Village. Foster parents and community carers were recruited and trained to rehabilitate and counsel children in difficult situations and those in conflict with the law; however, funding was lacking.

36. Mr. SEY (Gambia), referring to the Government's positive discrimination policy to encourage school attendance by girls, said that a committee had been formed to manage the school trust fund set up to provide financial assistance to needy parents; several "girl-friendly" schools had also been established and scholarships were offered to girls, although in the long term it was hoped that boys could benefit from such scholarships as well.

37. Mr. THOMASI (Gambia) said that judges were trained in the provisions of the Convention; the procedure for juvenile offenders began with an interview by the judge and sentences were light. In cases of adoption, reports had to be presented indicating that the best interests of the child would be protected.

38. Ms. KARP asked whether the Children's Code would provide for hearing children's views in matters concerning them, and whether guidelines existed for cases where a social worker might think it advisable to take a child out of his or her family environment.

39. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) said that, under the law, a child old enough to understand the issues involved in the case could appear before the court in the company of an adult, especially in custody cases; however, it was not the practice to bring very young children before the courts for fear that the experience would be too distressing. However, appropriate guidelines would be clearly set out in the Children's Code.

40. Mr. NDOW (Gambia) said that he agreed with Ms. Tigerstedt-Tähtelä about the need for men to be involved in the implementation of the Convention because the country's value systems were based on deeply-entrenched male-dominated traditions; men needed to change their perception of development and their attitudes to women in particular, and sensitization efforts should cut across religious and economic divides. Replying to a question about the data collection system, he said that it was in theory centralized, but that it had become decentralized over the years due to poor coordination within the Central Statistics Department.

41. Ms. CHUTIKUL said she imagined that street children would find it difficult to adapt to a formal classroom setting and wondered whether the State party had considered street teachers. The report (CRC/C/3/Add.61) indicated that the majority of street children were Gambian, although many of them came from neighbouring countries. She asked whether any bilateral cooperation had been established in order to stem the cross-border flow of children. She also wondered whether the lack of information on special education in the report was due to a lack of available data and suggested that studies should be conducted on specific groups of children, such as child prostitutes. She asked why the Gambia had not drawn up a national plan of action in accordance with the recommendations of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.

42. The initial report referred to the prevalence of negative attitudes to Western-type education, in particular concerning the education of girls. Did the people associate modern educational practices with foreign values, and if so, were there any alternative approaches to education? While the Government maintained that basic education was compulsory and free, the Committee would like to learn whether parents had to pay for any equipment, textbooks or uniforms. How did the Government monitor attendance? The delegation should explain the reasons for the high drop-out rates, provide information on the school repetition rate and describe the measures taken to improve the situation in the schools. How had the teaching of human rights and children's rights in particular been received by teachers and parents?

43. Ms. KARP, noting that the anti-AIDS policy in the Gambia had apparently been limited to advocating abstinence, suggested that the use of condoms should be encouraged. The age of criminal responsibility, 7 years, was very low, notwithstanding the fact that judges took

discernment into account in cases involving children up to the age of 14. What had been the conclusions of the National Committee on Juvenile Justice set up in 1998? Would a reform of the juvenile justice system be part of the new Children's Code? She asked whether the Government had made any efforts to hire more social workers and probation officers so as to assist juvenile offenders. While welcoming the Government's decision to integrate disabled children in regular schools, she wondered whether any concrete support or training was provided to teachers and other school staff to help them do so.

44. Ms. OUEDRAOGO pointed to the need to distinguish between street children and talibé children, and called on the Government to study the situation of talibé children by working with traditional chiefs and heads of Koranic schools. The initial report recognized that the health services and advice provided to adolescents were inadequate. What was being done to improve them? How were adolescents protected against drug abuse, and how were they involved in the anti-AIDS campaign? The report also lacked information on AIDS orphans. Had a strategy for the sale of iodized salt been adopted by the Government, in accordance with the resolutions of the Organization of African Unity?

45. She sought information on programmes to improve the quality of education, including training programmes for teachers of disabled students. The report referred to certain social factors that adversely affected children's quality of life, including early marriage, lack of family planning and polygamy. Had the Government undertaken any measures to address such matters? Expressing concern about the payment of maintenance for immigrant children, she asked whether the Government had ratified the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Were the Koranic schools managed by the Ministry of Education or placed under its supervision?

46. Ms. AL-THANI suggested that the Government should involve religious leaders in its campaign against consanguineous marriage. The written replies stated that a very high percentage of children admitted to hospital had malaria, and that 47 per cent of deaths in hospital were attributable to that disease. In light of the fact that malaria was preventable and could be treated, those figures were staggering. They indicated that the disease was a major health problem that required immediate and specific attention, over and above the Government's Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses approach. According to the delegation, refugee children were given anti-malarial bed netting. Were Gambian children provided with such preventive means? Was the high mortality rate attributable to a lack of medicine, or rather to the late arrival of patients at hospitals? Lastly, she asked why the vaccination coverage rates had recently fallen across the board, and by a significant amount.

47. Mr. CITARELLA expressed concern about the problem of abuse and neglect, one of the causes of which had been cited as the high drop-out rate, in particular in rural areas. The initial report recognized that vocational training for children under 17 must be improved in order to lower the drop-out rate. Had any efforts been made in that regard? He questioned whether the punitive sanctions mentioned in the initial report were sufficient to deal with the problem of street children, and suggested that preventive measures were needed as well. Had the Government made any progress in establishing a legal framework for the enforcement of free and compulsory education?

48. The CHAIRPERSON, speaking as a member of the Committee, asked why the net enrolment rate had declined between 1998 and 2000, and whether schools were accessible to disabled children.

49. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ, noting that the Government linked the high drop-out rate with child abuse and neglect, asked whether any studies had been done to find the root causes of school drop-outs. It was possible that the inadequacy of the curriculum was in part to blame. There was apparently no reciprocal recognition of primary and secondary school diplomas between the Gambia and the other countries of the region, but the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had suggested that programmes could be set up with international cooperation to ensure such recognition. Lastly, the delegation should inform the Committee of the reasons for the late submission of its initial report.

50. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) said that, while the idea of training specialized teachers to teach street children was an interesting one, it would involve some very special requirements, as the teachers would have to provide much more than simply educational support. The vast majority of street children were not Gambian, but foreign. The information in the report was no doubt erroneous in that respect.

51. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia) said that although no cross-border consultations had previously taken place on issues related to children, the Department of Social Welfare had recently convened a meeting of representatives of neighbouring States to discuss the need for child protection and the monitoring of cross-border transfers of children. The Department of Social Welfare had devised a draft plan of action for child protection, in accordance with the Declaration and Agenda for Action of the Stockholm World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. A workshop on that subject had been scheduled for mid-November 2001 to raise awareness among policy makers and members of civil society.

52. Mr. SEY (Gambia) said that formal education had for some time been associated with Western values and had not been considered useful in certain quarters. However, that attitude was changing. Many communities, for example in rural areas, were now sending their children to school in larger numbers. Approximately 10 per cent of student enrolment was in madrasas, or Koranic schools. The Government was interested in ensuring that core subjects and English would be taught at such institutions.

53. Education was free insofar as there were no tuition fees. Parents were not expected to provide furniture or other materials at the basic education level, and textbooks were provided to students through a rotation scheme. For some of the school services, however, parents were asked to contribute a token sum, which could be paid in instalments.

54. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) said that the Government's aim was to make education completely free but that resource constraints obliged it to take a gradual approach.

55. Mr. SEY (Gambia) said that a recent study carried out within the framework of a public spending review had identified illness and cost as the two main factors contributing to the high drop-out rate in schools. The Government was doing its best keep the costs as low as possible,

particularly for the least well-off, and encouraged schools to run school farms and carry out income-generating activities to supplement the school feeding programme organized by the World Food Programme.

56. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) said that another reason for the high drop-out rate was the fear felt by parents when they had to send their children far away to a school, especially when the child was a girl and the school was in a big city. The Government had tackled that problem with some success by increasing the number of schools in the provinces.

57. Mr. SEY (Gambia), replying to questions on human rights education in schools, said that a human rights curriculum had been drafted but was not yet in use. However, aspects of democracy and human rights were taught as part of social and environmental studies, without any resistance from either teachers or parents. In addition, the Civic Education Commission sensitized the public to human rights issues.

58. On the question of the high repetition rates in schools, he pointed out that comprehensive data on them were provided in the written replies to the list of issues raised by the Committee. The Government was considering a proposal to draw up an action plan with the aim of reducing the rate to a maximum of 4 per cent, but it had to be borne in mind that there was little point in allowing children to move up a class if they were not ready for such a move from an educational point of view.

59. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia) said that, given the deeply religious nature of Gambian society, where 9 out of 10 people were Muslims, the Government was obliged to tread carefully in its efforts to educate children in the use of condoms as a means of contraception and protection against AIDS and HIV. The first family-planning programme it had introduced into schools had been attacked by religious leaders and parents and had had to be replaced by a programme focusing on abstinence as a means of contraception. The Government was therefore aiming its campaign on the use of condoms at young people outside school, through radio and television programmes.

60. Mr. NDOW (Gambia) said that the low rates of contraceptive use, which had been stable at about 12-15 per cent for the past two decades, were the result, not of ignorance, but of cultural factors and value systems. For that reason, the Government was concentrating on explaining the advantages of having smaller families and spacing out births.

61. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia) said that adolescent health, and particularly young people's reproductive health, was a high priority in the Government's revised health policy. AIDS orphans were mostly taken care of by the child's extended family, with the support of the Department of Social Welfare where necessary, and not institutionalized as a matter of course.

62. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) added that a support group had recently been set up for HIV/AIDS sufferers with the help of a $15-million World Bank grant, which should make a big difference to the care provided for patients of all ages.

63. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia), referring to malaria treatments, said that bed nets were made available for refugees and all Gambian children and families. Cheap net-dipping products were advertised on television and were easily available and the Gambia was at the forefront of the Roll Back Malaria programme. One of the problems the Government was trying to address through its national programme to integrate the management of childhood diseases was the problem of late reporting. It was also trying to encourage a holistic approach to child health in clinics and health centres.

64. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) acknowledged that the Government appeared to be losing the battle against malaria despite the best efforts of the Roll Back Malaria programme and the presence in the Gambia of the Medical Research Council laboratories, where anti-malarial drugs were tested. The Government was trying to raise people's awareness of the environmental aspects of the problem, especially the dangers of stagnant water, and to improve reporting practices, but the truth was that a radical solution was needed, and without assistance the Government was unlikely to find it.

65. Mr. NDOW (Gambia) said it was not easy to explain the drop in vaccination rates. All he could say was that they had fallen in urban and semi-urban areas but were actually rising in rural areas. Whether the fall was due to economic or social pressures, people in urban areas were simply not responding to the Government's continuing campaign to promote vaccination.

66. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) said that consanguineous marriages were mostly a customary phenomenon, though sometimes misconstrued as a religious one. The Government was gradually educating people on the undesirability of such marriages.

67. He assured the Committee that his Government was quite willing to take up any further opportunities for cooperation with UNESCO.

68. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia) said that quite a number of programmes had been provided to train teachers in how to deal with children with mild disabilities who were educated in mainstream schools. There were also plans to provide facilities for severely disabled children in provincial areas, in addition to those already available in urban areas.

69. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) pointed out that the St. John's School for the Deaf and Dumb was staffed by well-trained teachers who not only provided an excellent primary and secondary education for pupils but also monitored their progress in the world of employment when they left school.

70. With regard to the late submission of the initial report, he said that the main reason for the delay was that no department had been assigned specific responsibility for coordinating the responses of the various ministries concerned. As that problem had been rectified, he fully expected that the Gambia would be able to comply with its reporting obligations in future.

71. Ms. THOMASI (Gambia) informed the Committee that, thanks to support from UNICEF, all salt in the Gambia would be iodized within the coming year.

72. Ms. CEESAY (Gambia), replying to questions by the Chairperson and Ms. Karp, said that all activities relating to juvenile justice were coordinated by the National Committee on Juvenile Justice. There was a separate wing and special skills-training courses for juveniles in prison and the police and magistrates were being sensitized to the preferability of non-custodial sentences for young offenders. It was envisaged that legislation on juvenile justice would be incorporated in the Children's Code rather than a separate code or the Penal Code.

73. Ms. CHUTIKUL asked what the Government intended to do to improve the quality of education, given that over 90 per cent of pupils failed to reach the required level in the core subjects in primary education.

74. Mr. SEY (Gambia) said that quality was one of the three main objectives of Gambian educational policy, the others being relevance and access. The Department of State for Education was studying various ways in which to improve quality, including through an effective allocation of its budget for teaching materials. It was considering increasing the length of the school year in order to increase the "time on task" - the time actually spent on learning - and allowing more flexible timetabling. It was also considering the introduction of performance standards linked to learning objectives and of regular visits by inspectors from the Standards and Quality Assurance Directorate. To raise teaching standards, it was looking into the possibility of providing workshops and distance-learning courses for teachers. In general, the Department was going to shift the emphasis from policy formulation, with which it was fairly satisfied, to closer observation of what actually happened in the classroom, where policy was put into effect.

75. Ms. CHUTIKUL said she had very much appreciated the frank answers the Gambian delegation had given to many of the questions raised in the discussions. The Committee's concluding observations would deal with some of the articles of the Convention which were not yet being fully complied with, in areas such as legislation, coordination, monitoring and data collection. They would also address shortcomings in the observation of children's rights to health, education and various forms of protection. She realized that it would be a major challenge for the Government, with its limited resources, to comply with all the Committee's recommendations, but she was confident that, given the Government's commitment and political will and the full cooperation of NGOs and international organizations, the future would be brighter for children in the Gambia.

76. Mr. JOOF (Gambia) assured the Committee that his Government was committed to implementing all the provisions of the Convention fully, notwithstanding the financial and other constraints facing it, and that the Department of State designated for that purpose would remain active. He took the opportunity to pay tribute to UNICEF for all its assistance to the Government of the Gambia, which would continue to work hard to overcome the shortcomings identified in its implementation of the Convention and to consolidate the progress it had already made in the field of children's rights.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.